

## Breakfast of Champions by hrhbrittany

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**Summary:**

As their senior year draws to a close, Stan and Richie meet for bromance and breakfast foods.

## Breakfast of Champions

When Stan began applying to colleges, he started a list of things he couldn't wait to leave in Derry: The evil clown, obviously, with all the traumatic memories attached. Bullies. The ugly murals downtown. The way old ladies at the synagogue never let him live down his bar mitzvah, despite Richie's assurances that it was "the first and probably last time he'd ever be a badass." His parents, sometimes.

When the first acceptance letter arrived, it turned into a list of things he would miss: His friends, obviously, with all the shared traumatic memories attached. Swimming at the quarry and bird-watching at the standpipe. Riding his bike with the sun on his face and the breeze in his hair, knowing the streets so well that he didn't have to think about which turns to make and oftentimes found himself at his destination without once considering the path he needed to take there. His parents, sometimes.

As he drummed his fingers on the steering wheel of the borrowed station wagon, which was currently parked in front of the Tozier residence, headlights cutting through the thick fog, he had to admit that he would miss this, too—The fog, that is, not Richie's perpetual tardiness, although, as graduation crept closer, he found himself more endeared to even his friends' most annoying quirks: pointless bickering in the clubhouse, obnoxiously loud gum-chewing, and the smell of stale cigarette smoke included. It was discomforting, to say the least, feeling nostalgic for things he still had. He sometimes wondered if it was how ghosts felt, watching life continue with a detached appreciation, which then raised the question of if he believed in ghosts at all—Ghosts were more plausible than an evil, shape-shifting clown, right? He knew he was unusual for never believing in the paranormal as a kid, but the luxury of skepticism had of course been ripped away from him in the most brutal way possible.

His mom's favorite jazz cassette tapered off before ending with a click, and he made no motion to restart it as he continued pondering ghosts and clowns and fog, making a mental note to ask Mike or Ben how New Jersey's climate compared to Maine's. He was sitting in silence still when Richie finally yanked open the passenger door and joined him, flinging his grubby blue trapper keeper to the floor. He gave Stan a once-over as he buckled his seatbelt and scowled.

"What the hell, man? We said *prom attire* ." He gestured to Stan's button down and khakis. "Those are your normal fucking clothes."

"It's what I would have worn to breakfast," he said defensively as he pulled away from the curb. "Prom attire was *your* thing."

In fact, this whole outing was Richie's "thing," born from a refusal to attend their school's traditional senior breakfast buffet at the country club, where class superlatives would be handed out over orange juice and cold bacon, "when you know damn well we're not popular enough to win anything." That small act of rebellion turned into getting breakfast at the local diner, which evolved into their own bootleg senior breakfast of sorts, complete with formal wear (or semi-formal, in Stan's case) and homemade award certificates.

"Besides," he added. "I have a jacket in the back."

Richie scoffed and switched on the radio before kicking his feet up on the dashboard, nearly folding himself in half to do so. His legs were too long to sit like that comfortably, but Stan knew better than anyone that Richie cared more about looking cool (that is, doing what he *thought* looked cool) than he did about comfort, practicality,

or safety, no matter how many lectures Eddie had delivered from the backseat about the likelihood of shattering both his legs in a crash.

As far as they knew, it would only be the two of them at losers' breakfast; while it had been easy enough to talk Bev and Ben into playing hooky, they saw no point in waking up early if they didn't have to. Eddie, who'd bought his ticket as soon as they went on sale, had waffled about what to do before ultimately deciding it wasn't worth inciting an argument with his mother over wasted money, while Bill, as a member of the student council, was obligated to attend and help present the awards. Mike, already away at college in Orono, had regretfully declined when they called him, unable to make time for a visit in the middle of finals week.

Stan spared at glance at Richie's raised legs as they approached a red light and finally noticed what he was wearing. He grimaced.

"Where did you get that?"

"Borrowed it from my dad," Richie said with a smug satisfaction. "He wore it to his prom."

Stan probably could have guessed as much from the inch of exposed skin at his wrists and ankles—Richie had slowly but surely overtaken his father in the height department by sophomore year. But even if it had fit properly, the suit was still an ugly, coppery brown plaid, and pairing it with a frilly salmon-pink dress shirt evoked simultaneous thoughts of vomit and birthday cake. He shook his head in disgust.

"You're not actually wearing that to the prom are you? It's horrible."

He rolled his eyes. "You know I'm not going."

He did know that, but he kept holding out hope that Richie would change his mind.

"I don't know why you're going," Richie continued. "We don't have girlfriends. We don't even have *girl* friends."

"We have Bev."

"We can't all take Bev, Stanley!"

"So what's wrong with going as a group like last year?"

"You know what's wrong with it." Richie crossed his arms and glared out the window.

Stan knew that, too, but neither of them wanted him to say it out loud.

For three years, the losers had attended dances as a group without incident; even on the rare occasion that one of them did have a date, they were simply a plus-one to the existing sevensome, but they had all underestimated the distinctly coupley nature of the prom. For the first time, their arrangement had attracted stares and jeers from their

classmates. Stan didn't think it was anything as bad as what they'd experienced when Bowers and his friends were top dogs—No bullies had ever truly managed to fill the power vacuum his gang had left behind—But evidently Richie was still bothered by it, even though they had all laughed it off at the time.

“One more month,” Stan reminded him as he pulled into a parking spot. “Then we're out of there.”

The thought terrified him almost as much as it soothed him. He hoped it did more of the latter for Richie.

Stan fished his folder and sport coat out of the backseat as Richie bounded ahead of him into the diner, any residual seriousness from their conversation evaporating like the morning's fog in the steadily rising sun. By the time he caught up, Richie was already attempting to charm the waitress, a short, older woman who had worked there as long as either of them could remember.

“—School-sanctioned, an institution, a time-honored Derry tradition, and I, for one, am a young man with great respect for Derry tradition, same as my friend Stan here.”

Stan smiled meekly. She eyed them both with suspicion.

“You told me Skip Day was last week.”

“Ah, but Susan—May I call you Susan?” Richie leaned in with a

whisper. “The secret is, any day can be Skip Day when a senior is skipping.”

He winked.

She led them to a booth and poured two cups of coffee with no further comments.

Richie eagerly set upon filling his with a sickening amount of sugar and cream, and Stan watched him judgmentally over the rim as he took an experimental sip. The taste wasn’t bad, but it also wasn’t as strong as his parents made it at home. He reached across the table and stole a single sugar packet from Richie’s horde.

He looked up. “What?”

“Aren’t you afraid she’ll tell our parents?”

“Susan? Nah, I tip too well. Plus there’s my irresistible wit and charm  
—”

“Wit and charm won’t help if you get held back for skipping too many times.”

“*Stanley*,” he said in an affronted tone. “I’ll have you know that it says in the student handbook we’re allowed up to *thirty* absences in a year, so theoretically I could skip every day and still graduate—

Really, I'm only showing up at this point as a gift to you and the rest of our humble peers."

"Wow, you shouldn't have."

With that, Richie snapped open a menu. Stan followed suit, though it was mostly for show, considering he ordered the same thing (two pancakes with scrambled eggs) every time. He lowered his menu thoughtfully.

"I can't believe *you've* read the student handbook."

"Obviously," he replied without looking up. "I never half-ass my slacking."

He had a point there, Stan thought to himself once Susan had come and gone with their orders. Despite getting nearly perfect grades throughout elementary and middle school, Richie had always been what the more charitable adults in his life described as "rambunctious" or "behaviorally challenged" and what the less charitable adults referred to as "a goddamn menace." All seemed to agree that he would grow out of it eventually, but if he would, he hadn't yet. Instead, he spent his high school career dedicating himself to the art of just getting by—Which, to the resentment of several of their classmates and, Stan suspected, *most* of their teachers, still didn't prevent Richie from making the honor roll most semesters.

"If I can get good grades either way, why would I waste time doing shit I don't wanna do?" He would argue.



Shit he did want to do: Listen to music. Join the improv club. Hang out with the losers. Smoke pot with the improv club. Watch movies. Quit the improv club.

Shit he didn't want to do: Homework. College Applications.

Maybe that was the natural conclusion of his academic career—A smart kid who couldn't focus and didn't live up to his potential because he would rather goof off.

Stan doubted that, though. True, Richie had been distractible as a kid, and mischievous at times, but not lazy. His "let's fuck around today because we might be dead tomorrow" attitude came later, and Stan didn't have to wonder what caused it.

The summer of 1989 appeared to have accomplished nearly the opposite effect on the other losers. Finally able to process Georgie's death, Bill had a weight lifted off of him; he devoted himself to speech therapy, and his stuttering had all but disappeared. He ran for student council, and, even more surprisingly, he won. Eddie's confidence had skyrocketed after standing up to his mom. He found an outlet for all his excess energy in athletics and was successful enough at track to earn himself a partial scholarship to some private school that none of them had ever heard of but he assured them was *very good*. Stan hadn't really known Ben, Bev, and Mike well enough beforehand to point out the exact ways that they had changed, but it was obvious to anyone that their newfound friendships (and, in Bev's case, a change in custody) had done them a world of good.

That's not to say that any of them had an easy time of it, of course—

Bill still had to mourn his brother, and they all sat in the clubhouse swapping nightmares now and again, avoided certain parts of town, honored the buddy system far longer than was normal or expected of teenagers—But Stan couldn't help but feel like they had more preparation, or at least more *warning*. He and Richie had gone into that summer with no survivor's guilt, no dead or absent or abusive family members to speak of. (Their parents could be hardasses sometimes, and they didn't always "get" their sons, but, really, isn't that true of most parents?) They put up with far more than their fair share of bullying, sure, and bigotry, but that seemed to be almost standard for Derry, if not the rest of the world. Compared to their friends' home lives, they didn't have a lot to complain about—And they knew as much! They were grateful! But it *did* leave them as the only two students taking a crash course in what the others had already learned:

Protect yourself.

Protect your friends.

Adults will not protect you.

The world will not protect you.

He supposed this lesson probably didn't make him noticeably different to outsiders. There was the spectacle at his bar mitzvah, but that was over in an instant and didn't spread far beyond the temple walls. But internally? Their experience with Pennywise had forced him to question his entire view of the world. It flew under his parents' and teachers' radars—He'd always been a "good kid." Studious. Fastidious. Hard-working. Particular. A perfectionist. "A pleasure to have in class." Nobody saw how he suddenly *needed* his

schoolwork, *clung* to his schoolwork.

He devoured class after class. Chemistry and physics and math, beautiful math, all of the math: Algebra and Geometry and Trigonometry and Calculus and Statistics. All the subjects with right or wrong answers, balances, formulas. Subjects that said this is how the world was, this is how it is, this is how it will be. Subjects that said this is the way everything works and anything else is a fluke or unreal or a calculation error.

He impressed the guidance counselor with his requests for academic electives. He maintained a constant presence on the Principal's List and carried his Mu Alpha Theta team to glory. He graciously accepted compliments on his "strong work ethic," never admitting that balancing equations was one of the only things that kept him from being consumed by complete and utter terror and sometimes he needed a particularly difficult proof to distract him from needle-sharp phantom pains in the ring of small scars that encircled his face.

Richie understood that about him with no explanation required, and he returned the favor. While Stan desperately sought any evidence that what happened that summer would never happen again, he knew Richie was choosing to live as if it would happen tomorrow.

His reverie was broken by a harsh kick to his bench.

"Hello? Stan? Stanley Uris? I was trying to tell you something."

He blinked. "What?"

“ *I* —” He pointed at his eye, comically magnified behind his thick glasses. “Was *trying* —” He struggled to find a way to mime that before abandoning the joke. “To tell you something. It’s kinda serious, but don’t freak out, okay?”

“Okay,” Stan said warily. If Richie’s somber demeanor didn’t make him nervous, the words “don’t freak out” definitely would.

“Okay, so I, uh—” He coughed into his elbow. “I’m sick. The doctor said it’s pretty bad—Senioritis. He thinks it might be terminal.” He let that line hang between them for a moment before snorting with laughter at his own joke.

Stan sighed deeply. “You are *not* funny.”

“I’m the funniest person you know.”

“No. Absolutely not.” He shook his head and took another sip of his coffee to hide the slight smile creeping onto his face.

“You’re laughing! I can see you laughing!”

He was spared having to defend himself by the arrival of their food.

As Richie dug into his own meal, Stan tucked a napkin in his collar

and carefully began cutting his pancakes into nearly even halves. He halved them again, and then he halved the quarters. With his fork, he scooted the eggs to the left side of the plate and arranged the pancake wedges in a straight line, stacking them on top of each other. Once the eggs had been walled off, he poured a small pool of maple syrup on the plate's now vacant right side, dipping and eating each piece one by one. Richie watched this entire process play out, transfixed, mouth slightly open as he chewed.

"You are so fucking weird," he said through a mouthful of hashbrowns. "You know that?"

Stan jerked his head noncommittally and swallowed his food before replying, "So are you."

"No one's arguing there."

"True." Stan returned to his pancakes.

Richie speared a sausage with his fork and twirled it, taking a bite off each end. ("Popsicle-style," his mom would have chastised him.) He studied Stan thoughtfully.

"You better not get a stupid accent."

Stan, about to start on his eggs, looked up, confused. "What?"

He took another bite of sausage. "At college? If you get that stupid *New Joy-zee* accent, I might stop talking to you."

"I'll start practicing now," Stan said dryly.

Richie didn't laugh.

"I'm *kidding* ."

"I'm not, it's annoying as shit."

"Okay, I won't." He ate a forkful of eggs. "Do you want to come with me and make sure?"

"What, go with you to Prince- *stan* ?" He leaned back as if he were genuinely considering it. "You could hide me in your dorm like an illegal pet, tell your roommate—"

"Tell my roommate, 'Don't worry about the monster under my bed, it's only Richie?'"

"Yeah!" He tapped his knife on his plate, a conspiratorial glint in his eye. "Yeah, 'It's only Richie, if you see a creepy clown with shark teeth and a massive forehead, though...'" He shook his head in mock dismay.

Stan, mid-chew, wrinkled his nose.

“Beep-beep?” He guessed.

“I’d rather not think about it while I’m eating.”

“Fair enough,” he agreed with a sigh. He dragged the knife across his plate, tracing letters in the greasy sheen. “It *would* be fun, though.”

Stan felt a sudden twinge of annoyance.

“You probably could have gotten in with me if you had just applied \_\_\_”

He dropped the knife with a clang that attracted curious eyes from the handful of other patrons and a disapproving frown from Susan as she wiped the counter.

“Yeah, I know, if I had just *applied* myself. Jesus Christ, you sound like my dad.”

“If you applied to the *school* , Richie. Fuck.” He neatly set his own silverware down and untucked his napkin bib.

“Well, I didn’t want to,” he said in a quiet yet defiant voice.

The frustration dissipated almost as quickly as it had appeared.

It was the same stubborn refrain he'd given the other losers again and again once their acceptance and rejection and deferral letters started rolling in that spring. In retrospect, if they hadn't been so preoccupied with their own applications in the months earlier, they might have questioned his cagey answers, rapid subject changes, and even more frequent tendency to turn a conversation into a joke, to say nothing of his claims that he had "just B.S.'d" every single essay. As it was, though, come March they were all left dumbstruck and asking what the hell he had been thinking.

All of them, that is, except Stan, who already knew what he had been thinking. It was a thought he encountered himself, one that never fully went away, no matter how many times he assessed and reassessed and re-reassessed the probability of it.

What's the point in pursuing a career if a clown is going to kill you?

And if you're not pursuing a career, what's the point in going to college?

And if you're not going to college, what's the point in applying?

It's hard to plan for a future you don't think will exist.



Stan stacked their empty plates and wiped up invisible crumbs as he decided what to say.

“I think I always imagined us going to the same school,” he began slowly. “We could have been roommates, and studied together, and —”

“Joined a frat? Thrown a toga party?” Richie offered.

“It’s not *Animal House* .” Stan sighed. “It’s gonna suck without you there, I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, me too.” He crumpled up a napkin and tossed it at him. “But I wouldn’t have gotten into Princeton anyway.”

“You could have.” He threw the napkin back. “Your grades, your SATs—”

“My zero extracurriculars, my non-existent letters of recommendation —” He misaimed and the napkin landed in Stan’s coffee.

“So maybe you would have been wait-listed,” he said, fishing the soggy lump out of his mug. “But you could have gotten in somewhere else. It’s better than just staying here and doing nothing.”

And there it was, the real issue he had, beyond his (admittedly childish) fantasy of them taking on the world of higher education

together: He didn't want to leave Richie behind. Yes, Mike was just a bit upstate and visited with some regularity, and Bev wouldn't be much further away at RISD, and she'd be sure to come back, and New Jersey was a *manageable* distance for holidays and long weekends, but all the time between that? Apart from his parents, he would be stuck in a town he hated, surrounded by people he couldn't stand and who couldn't stand him.

He took a fresh napkin and wiped the coffee from his fingers, eyes lingering on the jagged scar that stretched across his palm.

"You're my friend, Richie," he told the scar. "You're my *best* friend. I don't want you to be alone. Especially not here."

He felt Richie's eyes boring into him and forced himself to look up.

"I'm not—" He shook his head. "I'm not staying here. I am *not* staying here."

"Then where are you going?"

"I don't know, I—I have money saved, I can get a shitty car and drive it until it breaks down somewhere. Maybe I'll go to the west coast—I mean, I know a lot about music, I could be a DJ, or a VJ—Oh, I could be on *The Real World* —"

"There are jobs that aren't on MTV."

Richie ignored him. “I could go to New York and try stand-up, or Chicago—Chicago has really good improv groups—”

“You quit the improv club,” Stan reminded him.

“Yeah, because they weren’t actually funny, this is different—My point is, I’m gonna do something. I’ll go somewhere.” His voice dropped to a whisper. “I’ll figure it out, alright? Believe me, I’m gonna get the *fuck* out of here. Don’t worry.”

Stan’s gaze drifted to the ceiling, and he tried to pass it off as an eye-roll. “I never said I was *worried* .”

“I think it was implied,” he said, and he didn’t have to look at him to know he was smirking. His tone softened. “We’re gonna be okay. All of us.”

Neither of them was sure who he was trying to convince. They sat quietly as Susan cleared away their dishes, then Stan cleared his throat.

“So are we doing awards now, or—”

“Yeah!” Richie eagerly slapped his binder down on the table and began rifling through it. “Should we do ours first?”

"I only brought yours," Stan said, holding up his folder. He was pretty proud of them, too; it had taken both his lunch and his free period in the school computer lab, but he'd figured a program out well enough to make passable imitations of the certificates that were currently being handed out at the real senior breakfast. He eyed the binder apprehensively. "Why, what did you make for everyone else?"

"‘Shortest shorts,’ that’s Eddie, ‘most bangable mom,’ Eddie again, obviously, ‘m-m-most improved sp-speech impediment,’ Bill—"

"Are any of these *nice*?" Stan interjected.

"How was that not nice? I said he improved." Richie pushed up his glasses and continued leafing through the papers. "'Girliest girl—"

"I'm guessing Bev?"

"Guessing wrong, that's for Ben."

Stan rolled his eyes for real this time.

"Don't worry," Richie reassured him, smiling fiendishly. "Yours are all *highly* complimentary."

"Somehow I doubt that."

“They *are* ! Look.” He thrust one toward him. “Most likely to succeed...”

He took it, eyebrows raised. Unlike his creations, this one was handwritten with markers in a messy, upward-sloping scrawl. Each corner housed a small, vaguely phallic doodle of a bird. He wasn't sure if that was intentional or not, but he would have loved it either way.

“Most likely to succeed... at saving himself for marriage.” He narrowed his eyes.

“It's still succeeding.”

“Okay. Alright.” He flipped through his folder in search of something specific. “I wanted to save this for the end, but, Richard Tozier, I am presenting you with the ‘Not Funny Award.’”

Richie took it from him, saying nothing. A grin slowly spread across his face as he re-read it.

“What?” Stan asked. “I'm not joking.”

“No, of course not,” he said, trying to stifle a laugh. He plucked another certificate from his binder. “But you, Stanley Uris, have been voted ‘most likely to tell me I'm not funny.’”

“What?” Stan snatched it out of his hands. Sure enough, that’s what it said, written in the same format as the first one, dick-birds and all. “No fucking way.”

“Yes fucking way. You’re too predictable, man,” Richie said, still grinning wildly.

Stan shook his head, biting back a laugh of his own. “I don’t believe it. You must have seen them or something.”

“No, I just *know* you!”

The rest of their ceremony passed relatively without incident; Stan declared Richie the "most likely to become the fourth Beastie Boy" and was in turn named "biggest nerd." Back and forth they exchanged their awards, slowly whittling down their stacks until they each had one left for the other.

“Your turn,” Richie told him.

Stan hesitated. “Are you sure you don’t want to—”

“Same time?”

He nodded.

“Fine, just... Whatever, don’t make a big deal about this one. Pussy,” he added as an afterthought.

They traded them facedown, careful not to look each other in the eye before flipping them.

*Richie Tozier: The Funniest Person I Know.*

*Stan Uris: The Best.*

**Author's Note:**

anyone who knows me personally can tell you that their fake breakfast (including the "not funny" "most likely to tell me I'm not funny" and "funniest person I know" awards) was BLATANTLY plagiarized from my own life and I kinda enjoyed indulging in the nostalgia when I wrote it so I hope you kinda enjoyed reading it okay love you bye